

Highbury Grove School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100452
Local Authority	Islington
Inspection number	335544
Inspection dates	26–27 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Thomas Gibson

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	980
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	144
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steve Arnold
Headteacher	Truda White
Date of previous school inspection	29 January 2007
School address	Highbury Grove London N5 2EQ
Telephone number	020 72888900
Fax number	020 76908654
Email address	webmaster@highburygrove.islington.sch.org

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 44 part lessons, each taught by a different teacher, undertaking three joint observations with school staff. They held meetings with staff, students and governors. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation form, its monitoring of students' progress towards their targets, and the school development plan. They also considered responses to questionnaires completed by 143 students and 48 parents and carers

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following

- The effectiveness of the school's strategies to improve the rate of progress of White British students
- How effectively teachers use data on the prior learning of students to plan and develop their lessons.
- The impact of students' behaviour on their progress in lessons.

Information about the school

Highbury Grove is an average-size school and serves a local community where the number of students eligible for free school meals is significantly above average. There are substantially more boys than girls in the school. Over three quarters of the students are from minority ethnic backgrounds and over half speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average, although the number of students with a statement of special educational needs is below average. A high number of students join or leave the school partway through their secondary education.

The school is a specialist business and enterprise college. The school has gained a number of awards including Artsmark gold, Leading Aspect Award for Inclusion, Quality in Study Support gold award and National Healthy School Status.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Highbury Grove is an outstandingly effective school. Attainment has risen rapidly in recent years from a low starting point to close to the national average. This is particularly remarkable as students' attainment on entry has remained well below average. The school is an extremely caring, cohesive community in which students are known very well as individuals. Students say they feel safe at school and are entirely confident that issues they raise will be dealt with efficiently by the school. High expectations are set for each student in terms of progress, attainment and behaviour. Students respond positively to these high aspirations and this is clearly demonstrated by the good progress they make in the school. As one student said, 'Teachers care about us and want us to succeed.' This is a view emphatically supported by many students spoken with by inspectors

Teachers are very skilled in breaking down the steps in learning so that students understand key concepts and ideas and are enabled to make good progress. However students' enjoyment and opportunities to learn independently are occasionally inhibited by the overly-directive approach by teachers in some lessons. Very good use is made of information about students' prior learning in planning lessons. This also takes into account students' attitudes to learning and their pastoral needs, resulting in very calm, supportive learning environments. Excellent examples of teachers' written feedback were seen by inspectors; however, the school recognises there is more to do to make this practice consistent. The school has correctly focused on, and been very successful in, improving students' literacy and numeracy skills through a highly effective, personalised programme. The success of this programme, supported by the effective teaching, has enabled students to make good, and sometimes outstanding, progress. This has been combined with an excellent, highly tailored curriculum which meets the needs of the students and contributes to their enjoyment of learning. The provision within the extended curriculum for students to follow areas of learning of their choice in the 'specialist schools' programme is innovative and very popular with students. Students feel very well supported and confident to achieve because of the outstanding care, guidance and support they receive. The outstanding provision to support the needs of individual students has resulted in a significant decline in exclusions, which are below the national and the local averages, as well as a rapid rise in the level of attendance and improved standards of behaviour. Behaviour is now good in lessons and across the school.

The leadership of the headteacher is exceptional; she is very ably supported by a highly effective leadership team, who have embedded a culture of continuous improvement within the school community. The school is highly self-evaluative and any areas of

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underperformance are tackled rigorously. The commitment to continuous improvement is a driving force in this school and is highlighted by the fact that recent significant improvements in students' achievement have taken place while the school has undergone a full rebuilding programme on the same site. This shows that the school's capacity for sustained improvement is outstanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enhance enjoyment of learning by ensuring students are engaged in active and practical tasks in all lessons.
- Improve the consistency of teachers' marking of work so that it provides clear and specific guidance on how students can progress to the next level of attainment.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Students make good progress across a range of subjects and particularly so in English and mathematics. In the last academic year, White British students had not progressed at the same rate as other groups. The school robustly addressed this issue through highly effective individual support and the rate of progress for these students is now good. Inspectors observed their active engagement and participation in lessons. With effective planning of lessons to meet their needs, students with special educational needs and/or disabilities also make good progress and participate fully in lessons. This good planning is supported by effective in-class support and detailed monitoring of their progress.

The school has a robust and highly effective approach to managing behaviour and students respond to these high expectations. As a result of good teaching and students' own high aspirations, behaviour in lessons is good and supports learning very well. Students say they feel safe in the school and parents and carers strongly agree. Students value their school community and take on responsibility willingly. They are actively involved in the school council and have made a significant contribution to the design of the uniform and the development of the new house system. They will be running the new quiet room for personal and spiritual reflection for students and staff alike.

Students' attendance has improved significantly because of the school's individual support for students. Overall, attendance is now above average and improving for all groups of students. The number of students who are persistently absent from school has reduced significantly and is now below average. As well as ensuring students develop the key skills of literacy and numeracy, the school is alert to present and future employment opportunities in the local area and gives students the skills they need for further training and to be successful in the world of work.

Students engage enthusiastically in a very wide range of artistic, sporting and cultural activities which are supported by specialist professionals. The specialist schools' programme provides further opportunities for students to gain accreditation in a very wide range of subjects, including music, business and drama. They are enthusiastic

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about the increasing number of extra opportunities they are given, such as involvement in the junior sports leaders' award and the opportunity to perform in classical music concerts. Cultural understanding and tolerance between students within this diverse community is a reflection of the highly inclusive ethos within the school. As one student said, 'We come from all corners of the world and we get on well together and respect each other.'

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is good because teachers understand how to structure students' learning in order for them to make progress one step at a time. This is particularly important for students who have lower attainment or who have gaps in their learning. This structuring of new learning also means students are fully engaged and make good gains in their knowledge and understanding. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are adept at managing behaviour skilfully. Relationships between students and staff are excellent. In the small minority of lessons observed that were satisfactory rather than good, teachers overly led sessions, inhibiting students' independence and enjoyment in learning.

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Information on students' prior learning is used well, particularly to support underachieving students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. In the majority of cases additional adults provide good support through questioning and challenge. However, on a few occasions they overly direct learning and therefore restrict students' ability to develop their independent learning skills

Regular assessment opportunities and the detailed analysis of this by curriculum leaders as well as senior managers enable timely intervention and additional support to be put in place, which further contributes to the progress students make. Although students know their individual targets, and lessons clearly identify what the learning objectives are, students are not always clear about what they need to do to get to the next level because teachers' marking does not consistently provide clear guidance for students on how they can improve their work.

The curriculum is imaginative and tailored to the needs of individual students. Students have the opportunity to study a wide range of subjects and creative use has been made of the □specialist schools' options, which enable students to choose from a wide variety of accredited learning opportunities such as music, engineering, international business, which includes French, and theatre studies. These enable students to work with trained professionals in the specialist field.

Students who enter the school with low levels of attainment and those who are vulnerable have opportunities through the □nurture group' or the □access group' to develop their literacy, numeracy and social skills in a safe, highly supportive environment. This intensive support allows students to participate actively in their learning and make significant progress. The impact of this is clearly reflected in the rapid increase in the number of students gaining a C grade or above in GCSE English and mathematics. While some excellent opportunities for reflection and debate about current issues were seen in tutor times, this practice is not yet consistent across the school. Senior leaders already have plans in place to ensure this programme is systematically contributing to students' wider development. In addition to extensive academic support, there is a wide variety of extra enrichment activities such as cricket, basketball and information and communication technology clubs which take place after school and on Saturday mornings. Well over 100 school trips take place each year, including a Year 9 residential outward bound course. Senior leaders are very keen to ensure all students have the opportunity to participate and Year 7 are already saving small amounts to contribute to their residential trips.

Staff know students extremely well. There is a wide range of agencies working to support students, particularly the most vulnerable. A weekly pastoral support meeting, attended by a wide range of professionals who support vulnerable and □at risk' students, ensures there is regular monitoring of students' academic and pastoral progress. The subsequent planned interventions are bespoke and range from a light-touch academic support to multi-agency intensive support working with students and their families. This wide range of professionals involved in these meetings shows the experience and confidence of the school in working with a range of external partners to ensure the needs of students are met. Students feel extremely well cared for and are

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confident to seek advice and support. They note themselves that the school knows when they need support even before they do

The school provides targeted support for students who are new arrivals to the school and to the country. Individual provision is made to support their induction into the school; this includes a six-week programme with close liaison with subject teachers. A number of teachers are able to act as translators to support their developments in English and this enables them to make good progress.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior and middle leaders model a climate of very high expectations for all and have a deep commitment to building on and sustaining improvements. The school has developed effective practical plans based on individual student's progress to ensure that it achieves the most stretching of targets. The tracking and monitoring of students' progress data is outstanding, and the impact of this is seen in the rate of progress in literacy and numeracy in particular. The drive to improve teaching is at the centre of the work of curriculum leaders. An effective system of lesson observations coupled with joint planning sessions and a 'teacher buddy' system has resulted in the improved quality of teaching in the school. In curriculum areas, such as science, where students do not make as much progress as they do in English and mathematics, senior leaders have taken effective and robust action to address areas for improvement. The impact of these interventions is demonstrated by the improving rates of progress in science during this academic year. The quality of teaching and student progress information is directly linked to a highly effective system of performance management. Teachers and the whole staff are adaptable to change and new creative ways of working. Staff morale is high

The governing body has a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the school. They have a clear view of the school at the heart of the local community providing a high quality education for students of all abilities. They effectively monitor and evaluate the impact of improvement plans and offer a good level of support and challenge to the school.

The school is highly committed to working in partnerships which promote the learning and well-being of its students. The excellent impact of these partnerships is clearly demonstrated by the support students receive through a wide range of external

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agencies, the outstanding extra provision offered in music, the extensive extra provision for literacy, and the highly effective consortium arrangement available for post-16 students.

The school has established positive relationships with parents and carers. They are well informed about their children's progress and achievement. The school ensures that at parents' evenings there are a number of translators available to ensure parents have the opportunity to engage in their children's learning. The school has carried out a thorough audit of its work within the community. It has effectively utilised its business and enterprise status to work in the community, for example through the Addis Ababa' breakfast club and students making and selling cards to raise funds for overseas aid. The school provides the opportunity for pupils from local primary schools to learn to play musical instruments.

The school actively promotes equality of opportunity across all areas of the school. When there is evidence of underachievement, such as for White British students last year, effective support is implemented so that any inequality is effectively addressed. The school adopts good practices across all areas of its work in safeguarding. The school integrates issues about safety and safeguarding into the curriculum so that students have a very good understanding of how to keep themselves safe.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

The provision for sixth form education at Highbury Grove is provided within the Islington consortium of schools. The consortium is effectively managed and there are good

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procedures for monitoring the quality of the provision across all the schools. Over half the students in Year 11 stay on for the sixth form and the vast majority make good progress. Pass rates and retention rates are in line with the national average. Students say they enjoy their lessons in the sixth form and the wider opportunities available to them. They willingly take on responsibility within the school, such as student ambassadors and house leaders.

Teaching is consistently good, with some that is outstanding. There is a good tracking system to monitor students' progress, which enables effective intervention to take place where there is any underachievement. Teachers have high expectations and monitor students' progress closely. The curriculum is broad and offers both academic and vocational opportunities and is well matched at different levels to the needs of the students. The school's specialist status provides good opportunities for work-related learning. The guidance programme in the sixth form raises students' aspirations and ensures that they are confident and well informed about opportunities at university and in the world of work.

The leadership and management of the sixth form are highly focused on raising levels of students' achievement. The school has high aspirations for its students and has established effective systems to ensure that all groups of students make good progress and that they are able to benefit from the wider curriculum provision offered within the consortium of schools.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

The few parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive about their children's experience at the school. A very large majority of parents agree that the school is very well led, that the teaching in the school is good and that they are kept well informed about their children's progress. A very small minority of the responses did not agree that the school meets their children's particular needs.

Inspectors investigated the school's processes for care, guidance and support and found that the school is able and willing to adapt its provision to meet the changing needs of students and works with a very wide range of agencies to ensure this is done.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Highbury Grove School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school

The inspection team received 48 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 980 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	20	42	25	52	3	6	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	23	48	22	46	3	6	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	19	40	28	58	1	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	17	35	27	56	4	8	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	15	31	30	63	2	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	14	29	28	58	4	8	1	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	15	31	25	52	5	10	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	18	38	27	56	1	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	14	29	24	50	7	15	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	17	35	23	48	5	10	2	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	13	27	27	56	6	13	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	23	48	20	42	63	6	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	26	54	20	42	0	0	1	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



30 May 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Highbury Grove School, London N5 2EG

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school recently, I would like to thank you for making us welcome in your wonderful new school building. We enjoyed meeting you and talking with you in lessons and around the school. You were very positive about your school community and the support and guidance you receive from teachers and staff within the school. We have taken your views into account in coming to our overall judgement that Highbury Grove School is an outstandingly effective school.

Your headteacher and all the staff in the school have very high expectations for each and every one of you. They are determined that you succeed. It is clear that you enjoy school and the many opportunities available to you. Your school community is a wonderful mix of students from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. It was inspiring to observe how well you get along with each other.

To help your school further improve we have asked the school to:

- enhance your enjoyment of learning, by ensuring that there are a variety of active and practical tasks in your lessons
- further improve written marking so that it provides clear guidance for individual students on how to move to the next level of attainment.

Your positive attitude to learning supports the good progress you make in lessons. You have been very patient while your new school has been built and you will soon have wonderful outdoor facilities available to you. Your school has improved rapidly in recent years and now provides you with outstanding educational opportunities. You can help the school further improve by ensuring that your punctuality for school is exemplary

Yours sincerely

Thomas Gibson

Lead inspector

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